



File Code: 1950

Date: October 31, 2002

## Dear Friends and Partners of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie:

The Forest Service at Midewin is proposing to remove trees and shrubs at several locations within the prairie. We are providing you with information on the proposed project and invite you to send us your written comments.

**Your written comments must be received on or before December 2, 2002.**

With this letter we are initiating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) public involvement process. Your comments on the proposed action will be considered during the environmental analysis.

### Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to: 1) Improve grassland bird habitat areas by cutting and removing trees and shrubs that have grown up in old fence lines or were planted in hedgerows. 2) Improve grassland bird habitat by cutting and removing invasive trees and shrubs. 3) Enhance native habitat within woodland, savanna, prairie and wetland remnants by cutting and removing non-native and invasive trees and shrubs.

### Proposed Action

The areas proposed for treatment are indicated on the attached [maps](#). Approximately 1635 acres are proposed for treatment: (200 acres of fencelines and hedgerows, 1185 acres of grassland bird habitat, and 250 acres of native habitat). Existing hedgerows of trees fragment or divide grassland areas into units too small to serve as quality habitat for important grassland birds, including the upland sandpiper, bobolink, and Henslow's sparrow.

Native and non-native invasive tree and shrub species are invading grassland bird habitat and degrading quality habitat needed by grassland birds. The size of available large open areas needed for nesting and raising young birds is decreasing as trees and shrubs encroach onto the grasslands.

The remnants of savanna and woodlands at Midewin are overgrown with invasive and non-native trees and shrubs that out-compete the native species. The tree and shrub species proposed to be cut and removed include but are not limited to: Osage-orange, autumn olive, honeysuckle, green ash, red haw, sandbar willow, and eastern cottonwood.

Methods of tree and shrub removal may include: cutting by chain saw or other machinery, chipping the smaller woody material and stacking the larger pieces at designated sites, mowing with heavy machinery such as a brush hog, and girdling.



## Existing Documents

This proposed project would contribute to the prairie ecosystem restoration desired conditions described in the Midewin Prairie Plan by:

- Reducing populations of invasive plant species within native prairie, wetland, woodland and savanna remnants, and
- Restoring large open areas of upland prairie by removing trees and hedgerows.

Habitat management includes cutting and removing selected species as proposed here, prescribed burning, herbicide treatment, and planting with desired species. Prescribed burning and herbicide application were previously analyzed in separate documents and Decision Notices approved in August 2001 and May 2002.

To prevent re-sprouting of woody vegetation, stumps would either be ground and chipped or treated with herbicide and girdled trees would be treated with herbicide as described in the Decision Notice on Controlling Invasive Species signed on May 28, 2002 by the Prairie Supervisor.

## Issues

Preliminary issues include the temporary disturbance of deer hunting, temporary disturbance to existing native plant species and sensitive animal species, and the potential to disturb heritage resources. These issues and any other key issues identified during this public information period will be addressed in the environmental document.

## Mitigation Measures

To minimize or avoid impacts to important resources the following mitigation measures would be implemented:

- a) Time work activities to minimize impact to sensitive animal species.
- b) Conduct work with heavy machinery at times when the soil is either dry or frozen to avoid soil compaction, deep rutting, and to minimize disturbance to desired plant species.
- c) Designate access routes on the sites for heavy machinery to minimize areas disturbed.
- d) Avoid known heritage sites and stop work if a site is discovered.
- e) Designate areas to dispose of chipped woody material or to pile large woody material.

## Preparing Written Comments

When preparing your written comments, please consider the following questions:

- What information about the project area(s) do you believe is important to this proposal?
- What are the potential effects of this proposal that you are particularly concerned about?
- Are there other reasonable ways to accomplish the proposed action and achieve the project goals?
- What environmental effects do you feel are important and should be addressed? Please state your rationale for why they should be analyzed.

Based on similar activities conducted in the past, I do not believe that the proposed action of cutting and removing non-native and invasive tree species will have a significant impact on the environment. The effects on the soil, air, water, sensitive and Federal listed threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and heritage resources in the area will be analyzed, before making a final determination. The Prairie Supervisor will be the deciding official for this project.

If you have questions about the proposed activity, contact Renee Thakali at the address above, or via email to [rthakali@fs.fed.us](mailto:rthakali@fs.fed.us), or call her at (815) 423-6370. Please send your written comments to Renee Thakali by December 2, 2002.

Thank you for your interest in restoration at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Sincerely,

/s/ Renee Thakali, for

LOGAN LEE  
Prairie Supervisor, Midewin National  
Tallgrass Prairie